squeezed

I believe the vast majority of technicians are nice folks, and everybody knows what happens to nice folks. Sooner or later they get squeezed.

For you struggling student technicians and brand new A&Ps out there, who are not yet sporting your own individual custom designed set of aviation callouses on your hands, allow me to give you, first a definition of the term "squeezed," followed by three examples of what getting squeezed is all about.

First, getting squeezed relates to being forced into an ethical decisionmaking process in which one must choose between a right but unpopular option, and a wrong, but popular option.

First example

Our first example of a moral dilemma technicians can find themselves mixed up in goes something like this:

You are now a technician working for a Fortune 500 corporation. It's a great job. The best job that you ever had. You have good hours, good wages, good recurrent training, and state-of-the-art aircraft to work on. You even have a great boss, the chief pilot, who evens helped you perform the "C" check inspections and repairs on the company's aircraft for the last couple of years.

The squeeze begins innocently enough. One day in the middle of a causal conversation during lunch, the chief pilot after putting you off guard with a little warm and fuzzy chat, asks you to sign him off to take the airframe and powerplant test based on all the experience he gained working under your supervision and guidance.

You are taken aback by this request and your first reaction is to laugh and say NO! Polishing bright work, removing and installing inspection plates, spraying Pledge on the woodwork, and changing a couple of tires isn't exactly Aviation Maintenance Experience 101.

Then you remember all the "nice" things the chief pilot did for you like authorizing all the extra training, buying the new APU cart, and covering up for you when you forgot to stock the liquor cabinet with ice on the last overseas flight the CEO was on.

You put him off for a while with some inane remark like "let me think about it." In a quiet corner of the shop you and your conscience run the problem through your head.

Following the laws of troubleshooting you have identified the problem; now you are searching for solutions. On one hand, you have three years to go to be vested in the company's retirement plan and if you refuse to sign him off, you might have just created an enemy — a powerful opponent who can make you look bad in front of the big boss in a New York minute.

On the other hand, if you sign him off, he's your true pal for life, and he still has to go to the FAA and get signed off to take the written and practical tests, and he might flunk some or all of the tests and wind up dropping the whole idea anyway.

But you know this guy. Once he gets the written authorization from the FAA inspector, he will spend a week somewhere in one of those super-fast A&P test preparation schools. Then he will search for a benevolent designated technician examiner to take the orals and practicals, and in less than a month there will be a brand new A&P certificate in his pocket.

And as sure as bellybutton lint in a T-shirt factory, he will one day be standing in front of an aircraft with a wrench in his hand, ready to "fix" an airplane. In your mind's eye you can see him standing there, sun glinting off his sunglasses as he faces the nose of your aircraft with a wrench in his hand. He has become, the picture perfect, artist's rendition of an accident waiting to happen. You almost give him a firm NO, when reality bites.

You are suddenly reminded of the long lines in the unemployment office. So now, the stakes are high, your job may be on the line, but your sense of values are still in the way. So you continue to shadow box with your conscience and you lead with a mental upper cut: "The FAA inspector has

the final word on whether or not to sign off the chief pilot to take the test — A&P technicians don't," you think to yourself.

Your conscience, who is just as smart as you, avoids the jaw-breaking blow, and counters with a moral left jab to your temple of guilt. You keep thinking: "While it's true, it's the FAA inspector's responsibility to sign off applicants to take the test, remember this! That inspector's decision is for the most part is based on an A&P's statement that declares that the applicant for the airframe and powerplant rating is qualified to take the test."

Your conscience senses that you are weakening, but doesn't let up and gives you a shot to your moral solar plexus: "FAA inspectors, for the most part, place the same amount of credibility and trust in a technician's signature whether it's to sign off a repair, inspection, or an affidavit certifying that an individual is ready to take the A&P test."

You're on the ropes, when your conscience launches an ethical haymaker at your jaw bone of integrity; "you see," your conscience whispers as the punch lands on target, "the decision you are about to make all boils down to a matter of trust."

It was a devastating blow, you are down for the count. It wasn't a fair fight. Now you experience the squeeze — pinched tight, between two options. One right and one wrong. Now, how can you wiggle gracefully out of this vice and keep your pride and your job? The answer is obvious: You sit the chief pilot down and give him the facts.

Tell him that if he wants his A&P, he has to show you that he has 4,800 hours of practical maintenance experience working on aircraft. Ask him if he has any military maintenance experience, or had any additional time working as a un-certificated technician before he became a pilot. The FAA will even accept building a amateur-built aircraft providing the time is documented properly.

If he can't show you the background, and he still persists in wanting you to sign him off, try to gently remind him that he must twice certify — with his pen and ink — a signature that all experience or statements he lists on the FAA form 8610-2 Application for Airman (technician) Certificate are all true.

If he still continues to nibble at your ankles, despite your heads-up briefing, then the man obviously has the persistence of a pit bull and the IQ of a #2 pencil, so just bluntly tell him NO!

Soften the direct approach by telling him it's for his own good by reminding him that if he is caught falsifying the technician's application, his troubles with the FAA would just be beginning.

Second example

A second example of how new technicians can get squeezed occurs when a new customer, a potential good customer, wants you to sign an affidavit to his insurance company, that says the 2-inch crack you found in the outboard spar of the left wing was new and probably caused by the aircraft flying on the tie-down chains during last month's thunderstorm.

In truth, you figured that the crack has been there since 1972, based on the surface corrosion and dirt that was in, around, and on both sides of the crack. But the owner offers you a bone. In payment for "your cooperation" the owner will let you do the repair. He tells you that it is a win-win situation! FAA doesn't get involved! The only loser is the insurance company, right?

Taken at face value, every assumption that you make is, "right!" You and your customer, win. The FAA doesn't get involved because no aircraft's maintenance records were falsified, and the only loser here is the mean, evil, and rich insurance company who won't miss the money anyway. Why you might even feel a little like Robin Hood, acting out a "steal from the rich and give to the poor," scenario.

This example is a little more subtle than the first squeeze play we went over. In this one, the danger isn't too apparent because the FAA isn't in the picture. But trust me, it is just as dangerous. By signing an affidavit that the crack was recent, a technician "sells his soul" to the customer.

Maybe one could argue that it was just a naive attempt to be a nice guy, or maybe just trying to get a little more work in the shop to meet the monthly payroll, but the result is the same.
The truth is, the technician becomes engaged in a cheap swindle, a full-fledged partner in a fraud, and the signed affidavit becomes nothing less than an autographed lie. If caught, you could go jail. Never even put yourself in this kind of squeeze situation. Your reputation as a professional technician is at risk here. Don't lose in a minute something precious that has taken a lifetime to earn.

Third Example

This aviation maintenance industry is pretty complex profession. And because it is so complex, it poses a major threat to a young person's ego. I remember how dumb I felt when I was a brand new A&P. Even after three years' experience as an army helicopter technician and two years studying in an top-rung Part 147 school, the first year or so as a technician in a general aviation repair station, I felt dumber than a bucket of warm dirt.
But in the late 1960s the lack of confidence wasn't my only problem. I could not say: "I don't know how" when asked a question. I was afraid that because I didn't know how to fix something, or do something, my boss would figure that I had the mental capacity of a wheel chock and my A&P career would be short and uneventful.
So if my boss asked me if I could do a hot end on a PT-6, sure I could. Could I do a wing de-mate check on a Lear? Sure I could. There was nothing I couldn't do. But living a lie was hell, I was always on the defensive, and I felt "the squeeze" big time.
Needless to say, my boss found out pretty quickly that I was blowing smoke up his shorts, and I was detailed to working with a journeyman technician for a while until I grew up.
Unfortunately, over the past 30 years in this profession, I ran into some technicians, some younger and some older than I am, who still can't say, "I don't know how."
They can't seem to realize that it is OK to say "I don't know how." Not only is it OK, but it's the smart thing to do because the FAA has a rule, FAR 65, section 65.81 General Privileges and Limitations, that says you cannot do the work unless you have satisfactory perform the work before. Or as they say in Philadelphia: "If you don't know how to do it, don't do it!"
It's a fact that the more times you say, "I don't know how," the sooner the extra tight sensation around your colon goes away and you can concentrate on learning how to do the job properly.
But technicians who continue protecting their egos will never achieve professional status as a technician. They will remain forever squeezed in a narrow area between two options — right and wrong.